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Macao, China
January 7th 1845

Dear Brethren

Having been now permitted to reside several months on a heathen shore I with pleasure comply with the request of your corresponding secretary and with the well known wishes of the society, in opening a correspondence on subjects relating to the advancement of the cause of truth & holiness in China.

After having sailed 17000 English miles and been tossed upon the waves ninety two days we made Pana Head on the morning of Monday Sept. 23d. We had our first view of heathenism the next day at Anger. When we first beheld the rich verdure of the green hills of Java our hearts were filled with gratitude that we had been preserved from all the dangers of our long ocean passage & with joy at the prospect of soon entering our field of missionary labour; but when we saw the miserable half naked Malays these feelings were absorbed in compassion for those who have not the word of God & in gratitude that we had been called to bear the glad tidings to the heathen. The Malays, who are Mohammedans, were then observing the great fast of Rammeadan to which we were told they rigidly adhere, neither eating nor drinking from sunrise to sunset. A long passage of thirty days up the China sea brought us to Macao, 122 days from New York. We landed on the 22d of September and were met with a hearty welcome by Messrs Lowrie & Cole. Dr. & Mrs. Hepburn were also at

Macao at that time on a visit for Mrs. P's health which has been very bad ever since she came to the east.

Macao is a large city if the population only be considered as it contains about 35,000 inhabitants, of whom about 5000 are Portuguese. The city however occupies but little space, the streets being very narrow, and the houses filled to overflowing with human beings. It is not unfrequently said that Macao is an island. This is a mistake, it is but a part, and a very small part too, of the large island of Shan Heang or "the odoriferous hills." It is separated from the main part of the island by a very narrow neck of land, across which is built "the barrier" or stone wall, which formerly limited the walks of all foreigners into the country. Near this neck of land, and within a mile of Macao, is the little village of Mong Ha (or Wong Hea) at which the American treaty was signed.

The waters in this vicinity, and indeed I believe the whole of the bay in which this island is situated, are studded with small islands which are covered with high, and for the most part barren and naked hills, without a tree to relieve the appearance of sterility. The valleys however are generally fertile, either naturally or by cultivation; and by constant and laborious irrigation, they are made to support an almost incredible number of persons.

Although the Portuguese have so long been the possessors of Macao they are not the owners of the soil. They pay an annual rent to the Empire and exercise no direct jurisdiction over the Chinese inhabitants any further than to bring them to the notice of their own tribunals, by whom they are tried & sentenced. The Portuguese inhabitants are miserable and degraded, but

little better in any respect, and as to some points, even worse than the Chinese. They are for the most part ignorant and uneducated, yet are too proud to work and ashamed to beg, so that many of them are almost, at times, in a state of starvation. No one seems to know how they live, and yet when they appear in the streets they are almost universally dressed in the gayest style. As to religion I suppose few of them have any more idea of what true christianity is than the miserable idolaters around them. I had occasion near christmas to enter the house of a poor Portuguese and was quite surprised to find on a table a little arbour formed of tinsel and artificial flowers just like the little recesses or altars which are found in every Chinese house and shop before which lamps and joss sticks are burnt. Within was a little image, and before it two wax candles. "Whose image is this?" I inquired. "It is God" was the answer. It was an image of the infant Saviour in a reclining posture. On speaking of the folly & wickedness of such idolatry, the poor woman justified herself by saying that the same thing was to be found in every house in Macao. Such is the religion of Rome and Rome has the ascendency. Romish priests may be constantly seen in the street habited in the long black robe which designates their office, and the three cornered hat which also is part of their prescribed dress. It is supposed that there are about seven thousand native Papists in Macao, and several native priests. But whether any effort is made to instruct them in the principles of religion I have not been able to learn.* I presume they differ from other Chinese in little more than that they procure absolution once or twice a year and are buried with the Papal ceremonies. The priests appear to make but little effort among the Chinese in Macao, but merely perform the rites of the church for the Portuguese.

Within the last ten years I am told there has been a considerable change for the better among the native Portuguese, for they now pay considerable attention to education and the young men manifest a greater willingness to exert themselves being willing now to act as clerks for Merchants which they would not do at all until recently. The Government too is more liberal than formerly so that we are under no restrictions whatever as to the use to be made of the press, and there would be no difficulty in distributing Bibles & tracts nor even in establishing schools for the Chinese. The priests too are more liberal, or else more indifferent. The house in which I now write, the same in which is our press, is the property of a priest. Missionaries here however are under restraint and they cannot but feel it. Accordingly all have left but those of our board and we too in a few weeks expect to take our departure. The Portuguese Government by its illiberal policy toward foreigners has driven away almost all the mercantile residents as well as missionaries, to Hong Kong, although they would otherwise have preferred a residence here. The prosperity of the place is accordingly destroyed. There has been a very great falling off of the revenue derived from the customs & other taxes on foreigners, and the probability is that it will soon be a comparatively insignificant place. The Govt. is now in such a state of destitution that the troops, (in number about two hundred,) I am told have been without pay for two months. Last year there was a surplus of $80.000 in the treasury; a facts which will enable you to form some idea of the rapid decline of the place.

The facts which have just been stated have no direct bearing upon the cause of missions to the Chinese but they are connected with the state of religion in China and are such as will not be found in any publications. You will readily infer that it is not the Portuguese influence which is to uphold the cause of the great spiritual Babylon in China. Their influence is a mere nothing, and I believe there is not a single Portuguese priest in any part of the interior of China. I have heard of none. It is the French, whose character is peculiarly fitted for this delicate task, who carry the idols of Rome into the forbidden ground of the interior and substitute them for the images of Buddh. I mention this as throwing some additional light upon the estimate which we ought to form of the importance of the efforts which are now made, and in which you participate, to establish the true principles of the Reformation in France.

With regard to the prospects of success in missionary operations in China I think they were never more flattering. China is by no means open, but the points of access are more numerous and more favourable than they were prior to the late changes. At the northern ports the prejudices of the people are not so strong as they are in this province and they are said to be fast giving way. In all human probability missionaries will be able securely to establish Secondary stations in the populous villages in the vicinity of the large cities before the churches will authorize them, by their liberality, to occupy them. The mission of our Board has peculiar advantages. The funds & pecuniary liabilities of the Board have been so far free from embarrassment as to enable

them at this favourable juncture to do more for China than any other society. Accordingly we have a stronger force than any other Mission in China numbering in all fourteen persons. Our press too, if properly managed, will add an efficiency to the Mission which is not possessed by any other. The method of printing by movable type you are aware is but an experiment; one never before fully tried. Most of the missionaries here regarded it as a visionary scheme, and many still think that it will prove a failure. Thus far however it has been completely successful, beyond the most sanguine expectations of its friends; and I doubt not it will soon supersede every other method of printing among missionaries, and eventually among the Chinese themselves. Our press will not only perform a greater amount of work in a given time than can be done in any other way, but will do it more neatly and, as experience has demonstrated, at a less cost.

These facts of themselves I think lead us to the inference that peculiar responsibilities in regard to China are resting upon the Presbyterian Church of the U. S., by disregarding which she must incur a fearful amount of guilt. If faithful to herself she is destined to participate largely in the honours and spiritual blessings with which they shall be rewarded who are instrumental in reclaiming this ignorant and superstitious people from idolatry and sin and bringing them into the glorious light of the gospel of the blessed God.

You are aware that the stations which are to be occupied by us in the north are Amoy + Ningpo. The principal station

of the London Missionary Society is Shanghai as it will be also of several other societies, so that we shall probably be almost alone at Ningpo. The Church Missionary Soc. has just sent out two gentlemen to commence their mission in China, and it is quite possible that they may establish themselves also at Ningpo. I am most happy to say that these gentlemen, Messrs. Smith & McClatchie, are not in the smallest degree tinctured with Puseyism, but on the contrary are so liberal in their feelings toward other denominations, and have so much at heart the true interests of Christ's Kingdom, that we shall be able to welcome them as "true yoke fellows," and to labour with them on the most friendly terms. At present we have no prospect of being called to contend with any of the Tractarian coadjutors of Antichrist. Ningpo is not likely to be a place of so much commercial importance as Shanghai, but will for that very reason be a more favourable place for missionary efforts. Messrs. Way & McCartee, who spent the Summer in Chusan sixty miles distant from Ningpo are now established in the latter city. Bro. Loomis is expecting to sail to join them in one or two weeks, and Br. Loomis and myself hope to be able to follow immediately after the change of the monsoon in April or May; and possibly, if an opportunity offers, we may attempt the passage against the monsoon! We feel it to be a great disadvantage to be detained here so long on account of the difficulty of acquiring at Macao the language of the people at Ningpo. We have taken a teacher of the Mandarin dialect which it is said does not differ very much from the dialect spoken at the northern ports.

China however is like most other countries in having local peculiarities in different districts. The language of Paris would not be understood in the departments of France any more than that of Nankin and Pekin is understood in the provinces of China. I suppose these differences are much greater in this country than in any other; the different dialects being almost entirely distinct languages having only a few general features and perhaps some words & phrases in common. Not only is this the case, but even in the same province every little village and neighborhood has phrases and words and idioms peculiar to itself. The language spoken at Macao for instance, although it is the Canton dialect, differs very much from the language which is spoken at Canton. It is said that a man who had always lived in the city of Canton on going twenty miles into the country would hear many things which he would not understand. It would be strange if it were not so. We all know how unstable the English language was until it was fixed by King James' translation of the Bible, and how much hankering after change there is in certain quarters even now. So in China, in the lapse of ages the language has of course undergone some changes, and as the Chinese are greatly attached to the soil on which they were born, and as the sons generally occupy the lands of their fathers so that there is very little intercourse between the different provinces & different parts of the same province these changes have been confined to the immediate vicinity of the place where they were first introduced. All this

has reference of course only to the spoken language. The written language is as firm and immovable as the "everlasting hills". There can be no change in it, for here there is an infallible standard, a court from the decision of which there can be no appeal. Confucius has fixed the language. No change can be made without him, and Confucius is now dead, and that without having left his mantle, or at all events any thing more than his mantle, upon the shoulders of his successor. In fact the Chinese language presents to us the singular phenomenon of a people having two entirely distinct languages - the one written and the other spoken - and differing from each other as much as the Latin from the Greek, or the French from the Italian. Accordingly it is found that many persons who have committed to memory the four books, and read every character in them and most of the characters met with in other books, will read whole pages with the utmost fluency without understanding a single sentence. The reason of this is that the universal method of teaching is to make boys commit to memory all the characters in the four Books without attempting to learn the meaning of any, a task which occupies four or five years, and which I suppose too often completes the education. It has been often asserted that the Chinese are a nation of readers, but this thought now by many missionaries here to be a mistake, and there is no doubt at all that of those who do read a large proportion are such readers as I have just described. Many too who are engaged in business learn a few characters which are of most frequent occurrence in their particular business although they cannot understand

a sentence of any book, can read & write just enough to enable them to keep their accounts. As comparatively few can read understandingly, the number is still smaller of those who can understand what is read to them. The difficulty will be readily understood when it is recollected how many characters with different and opposite meanings, are pronounced in precisely the same manner. The difference of intonation is by no means sufficient to distinguish all such characters. It is a great mistake, though a very common one, to suppose that the same difficulty exists in common conversation. The difference consists in this, that where but a single character would be written to express an idea, two, three, or four words would be employed in conversation. For example the character for the sun is 日 ye, but in conversation two words, or rather one word of two syllables would be employed viz. 日 頭 ye taow. Many words too in the spoken language are made up of characters almost without reference to their separate meaning e.g. tung-se means things - but the characters taken separately mean east & west. Besides this, many words and phrases occur in the spoken language which cannot be written at all, and others which are never found in books, while on the other hand many phrases which are used in books are never used in conversation. You will perceive from these remarks that the difficulty of acquiring the language is not the only, nor the principal obstacle which it interposes in the way of the missionary. A far more difficult task will be to put religious books into such a form as that they will be understood by the

common people. To all the other difficulties must be added this - that it is a stereotyped language very well adapted for the expression of old ideas, but very ill calculated for the introduction of new ones. Neither can new characters be formed, nor new words be transferred from other languages.

As to the difficulty of learning the language I think it has been much exaggerated.

It will be exceedingly interesting to the Christian world to watch the development of the designs of Providence in reference to China. It is impossible for us to anticipate them, and speculation may be worse than useless. There are those here however who think it quite probable, not only that there will be an entire revolution in the language, but that the whole country will be politically revolutionized. It is said that the present aspect of political affairs indicates change. Things cannot remain, it is said, as they are. The interior of the country is not quiet, and whole tribes are able still to maintain their independence, having never been brought under the Tartar yoke. Whatever may be thought of this, our duty dear brethren, is sufficiently plain. Let us be found faithful in discharging it, and we know that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord; for he who is Head over all things to the church will overrule all the revolutions of empires so as to promote the great cause for which we labour.

And now, brethren, before I close I am tempted to ask, who among you will come to China? The Chinese are civilized, they are in many respects refined, they are industrious, they are ingenious, they are intelligent & capable of rapid improvement, but I am every day reminded that they are heathen. I am just on the borders of China but I am surrounded by thousands for whom I cannot but feel that there is no hope either in this world or in that

which is to come. Shall nothing be done for them? A few of us are here to attempt something in their behalf. But what are a few half dozens among hundreds of millions? As I stand here upon the borders of Asia I have on the one hand, the countless multitudes of China, wholly given to idolatry, and beyond, the still more degraded idolaters of India; on the other hand the broad Pacific separating me from christian America. If I could lift up my voice and cause it to be borne across the waters of the great deep, my first appeal brethren should be to you, and I would cry most earnestly — Come over & help us." Would that I could give the appeal the free unbiased know it would have if you could see and what I daily see.

Yours &c.

M. S. Culbertson

P. S. Since writing the above I have had a letter from Mr. Pohlman at Canton which he desires me to forward to you. Mrs. Johnson & Mrs. Abeel are expecting to leave Canton for Singapore in the course of the present month. Mr. Johnson is expecting to remain at Canton. Mr. Pohlman & Mr. Lowrie are about to commence studying the Chinese language at Canton. Mr. Lowrie has been appointed to the Amoy station. Mr. Pohlman is expecting to remain at Canton. Mr. Johnson is expecting to remain at Canton. Mr. Abeel is expecting to remain at Canton. Mr. Lowrie is expecting to remain at Canton